〈Recearch Notes〉 Bridging the Gap between Japanese and Foreign Communities through Communication and Critical Reflection

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Research Note

Bridging the Gap between Japanese and Foreign Communities through Communication and Critical Reflection

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This paper examines the changing nature of interpersonal relations between Japanese and foreign residents of Japan. Due to various domestic and international mechanisms, Japan's demographics have changed substantially in recent decades and are expected to change even further in the immediate future. One effect of these changes has been an increased presence of foreigners living and working in Japan, which is engendering newfound contexts through which Japanese society engages with diverse forms of cultural Otherness. Previous scholarship has shown that Japan's relationships with different foreign and minority populations have been largely problematic in nature and that foreign populations have formerly been relegated to the social peripheries. Majority-minority relationships have tended to be conceptualized in a predominantly volatile fashion that reinforces a rigid dichotomy between Japanese and outsiders. However, given Japan's changing demographics and the corresponding diversification of interactions presently taking place within Japan, it is worthy to investigate more meticulously the conceptual and material products of these intercultural encounters.

Utilizing qualitative ethnographic data, this paper suggests that the interpersonal dynamics between foreigners and Japanese are changing in ways that lead some Japanese to adopt a more positive image of foreigners. Drawing on theoretical insights from intercultural communication studies and applied linguistics, this paper elucidates how Japan's socio-demographic changes are creating new opportunities for Japanese and foreigners to reconceptualize themselves with greater orientations towards the other party, which results in allowing more positive forms of interpersonal relationships to emerge. This paper shows how these novel relationships develop and explains the important role that critical reflection plays in reconsidering the categorical constructs of Japanese and Other. These encounters and critical reflections materially manifest in emergent identities that allow Japanese and foreign residents of Japan to reorient themselves with greater proximity to the other party. However, despite these reorientations, barriers continue to exist that prevent more constructive relations from developing.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Identity, Foreigners, Interpersonal Relations

Introduction

Japan is presently positioned to experience a considerable demographic change as a result of a low birthrate, an aging population, and large numbers of young Japanese eschewing particular sectors of the nation's labor market. One effect of these changes has been the emergence of nationwide labor shortages, which thus far have in part been filled by foreign laborers. Despite the pragmatic difficulties foreigners may experience living in Japan, the nation remains a destination country for foreign workers who continue to enter Japan from a myriad of countries. Presently, foreign nationals comprise just over 2% of Japan's population. However, this proportion is expected to increase dramatically in future years; so much so that some experts estimate the composition of foreigners in Japan could

rise to 8 to 27% by 2050.[1] Such a diversification would have profound implications for the nature of Japanese society and the forms of intercultural relations that develop within Japan's borders. This is particularly true for the way that foreign-Japanese relationships unfold. Because Japan's diversification has been underway for some time, we may look to the encounters already occurring for clues as to how this future demographic change might proceed.

Although scholars have tended to focus on the problematic relationships that Japan maintains with its various foreign and minority populations,[2] others have suggested that there also exist alternatives to minority-majority relations whereby interpersonal encounters between these two parties lead to more positive and diversified outcomes.[3] These latter writers stress the fact that although foreigners continue to experience difficulties, barriers, and prejudices in Japan, economic mobility and social integration remain contingent upon numerous variables and are not limited to an all-or-nothing acceptance-exclusion dichotomy. Therefore, it is important to recognize and consider the ways alternative forms of minority-majority relations develop, to understand how they affect the ways Japanese and foreigners interact, and how the actors involved in these processes reconceptualize themselves in relation to each other and to their host society.

This paper will address these questions by examining how critical reflection can induce changes to the ways foreigners are conceptually positioned within Japanese society. Drawing upon ethnographic data collected from 2013-2015, this paper will demonstrate how, through the vehicles of intercultural communication and critical reflection, foreign and Japanese actors reposition themselves with greater orientations towards one another as these intercultural encounters occur.[4] In doing so, this paper draws from communications studies and applied linguistics to elucidate how critical reflection, induced materially by intercultural encounters themselves, leads to a more dynamic understanding of the experiences of foreigners in Japan. This paper suggests that as such increased understandings continue to materialize in accord with Japan's ongoing demographic changes, Japanese actors will be further compelled to reconceptualize the positionality and role of foreigners within Japan to a much greater extent. The following sections of this paper will provide a brief overview of the concept of reflexivity in relation to intercultural communication and then proceed to present ethnographic vignettes from foreign and Japanese actors to explain how these changes materialize in practice. It will then analyze this data and explain the implications of these reflections and changing positionalities.

1. Reflexivity, Identity, and Intercultural Communication

There has been a great deal of interest from disparate academic disciplines in discussing individuals who possess heightened levels of intercultural awareness and competence. These works have argued that individuals are capable of acquiring capabilities that transcend their own cultural milieu and allow them to navigate fluidly across real and imagined cultural barriers. One concept that aims to explicate the dynamics of such an individual is Peter Adler's idea of the "multicultural man." Adler suggests that "a new type of person whose orientation and view of the world profoundly transcends his indigenous culture is developing from the complex of social, political, economic, and educational interactions of our time" and that the parameters of this person's sense of self are neither

[1] David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, "Transcultural Japan: Metamorphosis in the Cultural Borderlands and Beyond," in David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu eds., *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.4

[2] See John Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[3] Edmond Akwasi Agyeman, "African Migrants in Japan: Social and Economic Integration," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 24, no. 4(2015): 463-486; Leiba Faier, *Intimate Encounters Filipina Women and the Remaking of Rural Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Tsu Yun Hui, "From Ethnic Ghetto to 'Gourmet Republic': The Changing Image of Kobe's Chinatown and the Ambiguities of Being Chinese in Modern Japan," in David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu eds., *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 135-158.

[4] This paper uses the term "orientation" to describe a process through which disparate groups of social actors – in this case, Japanese and foreign residents of Japan – understand their social and conceptual relationship towards one another.

fixed nor predictable.[5] Essentially, it is a multilingual and multiculturally-competent person who is not bound by cultural constraints. Other terms have similarly been utilized to describe individuals possessing higher degrees of intercultural competences. Michael Byram has suggested that becoming "bicultural" involves a process of critically reflecting upon one's own beliefs and convictions, which subsequently allows people to develop a greater sensitivity towards members of other cultural groups. In doing so, Byram implies that there may in fact be two disparate forms of an individual existing in the same body that possess intimate knowledge of two distinct cultures: "a person can hold within themselves two cultural, ethnic identities and…it seems that being two people is not difficult."[6] Relatedly, Christina Bratt Paulston utilizes the term "bicultural" to explain an individual that is somewhat "eclectic" in their cultural identity and possesses an idiosyncratic comprehension and fluency of other cultural practices.[7] This sense of being "bicultural" is characterized by highly personalized attitudes towards the other cultures one engages with, as well as a somewhat precarious sense of social belonging. Nonetheless, this "bicultural" person maintains a heightened awareness of other cultures and is capable of successfully navigating cultural boundaries. Although different in their content, each of the above authors postulate that individuals are not confined to their native cultural milieu and are instead able to develop skills to fluidly communicate across cultures without problems. Such postulations suggest individuals are capable of acclimating themselves in dynamic ways to different types of cross-cultural environments and that there is no cultural paradigm too difficult to transcend.

While it may be overly-optimistic to suggest that an individual such as Adler's "multicultural man" has already emerged, there are undeniably individuals who possess superior intercultural competencies. It is therefore worthy to consider what processes have led to such competences and what factors have fostered their development. Most germane to this paper are three particular forces that can allow individuals to develop this augmented competence: learning a new language, engaging in intercultural communication, and critical self-reflection. Although these are not the only mechanisms through which increased competences can develop, these have been shown to have important effects on the outcomes of individual learners and intercultural communication interactants. Thus, it is worthy to succinctly explain how these processes function to influence an individual's (inter)cultural experiences.

However, before doing so, it is worthy to first embark on a slight detour to discuss the concept of "identity," which lies at the core of many of the processes mentioned below. In its most basic sense, identity reflects how individuals perceive themselves, how they are perceived by others, and how individuals understand these two competing perceptions.[8] Identity has long been conceived as related to language learning and it has been noted that learning a language also affects the ways one thinks of themselves in relation to others.[9] Although scholars have recognized the connection between language learning and identity, there have to date been a multitude of ways scholars have operationalized the term "identity" and correspondingly structured their analyses of identity in relation to language acquisition.[10]

This understanding of identity suggests that people may possess numerous identities at any given time and that former notions of identity that see identity as fixed, stable, and essentialized – existing as a concrete given – are typically abandoned for understandings of identity that are more fluid and allow for a wider range of applications.

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[5] Peter Adler, "Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Cultural and Multicultural Man," in Richard Brislin ed., *Culture Learning* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press), pp. 24-41.

[6] Michael Byram, "On Being 'Bicultural' and 'Intercultural,'" in Geof Alred, Michael Byram, and Mike Fleming eds., *Language for Intercultural Communication and Education* (Clevdon: Multilingual Matters, 2003), p. 54.

[7] Christina Bratt Paulston, *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Bilingual Education* (Clevdon: Multilingual Matters, 1992), Chapter 5.

[8] Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, "Introduction," in Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe eds., *Discourse and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 1-13.

[9] H. Douglas Brown, *Principles of Language Learning* (White Plains: Pearson, 2000); Zhu Hua, "Intercultural Communication," in Li Wei ed., *Introduction to Applied Linguistics* (Somerset: Wiley & Sons, 2014), pp. 112-128.

[10] Julia Menard-Warwick, "Both a Fiction and an Existential Fact: Theorizing Identity in Second Language Acquisition and Literacy Studies," *Linguistics and Education* 16 (2005): 253-274.

Scholars have actively sought to adopt a more flexible usage of "identity" so as to obtain more nuanced understandings of how it operates practically. A number of "post-structural" scholars have been especially enlightening for underscoring the function of identity in relation to language learning. These scholars have posited that rather than seeing identity as fixed and static, it is instead viewed as inherently complex, malleable, overlapping, and dynamic. Individuals construct and assert identities based on highly contextual and subjective variables that more often than not lead to comprehensions of identity that do not ascribe neatly onto extant identity categories.[11] Such an understanding asserts that identity "is not a static, preexisting entity but rather evolves through a dialectical relationship between different ways of interacting and speaking in the world."[12] Identity can therefore be viewed as a multifaceted and discursive phenomenon, which is affected by a wide range of stimuli. It also asserts that although individuals may consider themselves as part of various collective bodies, no two individuals will understand their identities in precisely the same way. Recognizing these facts are important for fully understanding the types of identity transformations that unfold as a result of contemporary interactions.

There are numerous ways that language learning and intercultural communication affect such idiosyncratic constructions of identity in the contemporary world and in relation to diverse casts of multicultural actors. First, scholars have explained that learning a new language and its corresponding cultural components can compel perceptual changes within learners and in effect alter the ways they understand themselves in relation to others. H. Douglas Brown states that "meaningful language acquisition involves some degree of identity conflict as language learners take on a new identity with their newly acquired competence."[13] As individuals struggle to acquire novel cultural and linguistic competencies, they also develop abilities that transcend the language acquisition process and enter into the realm of wider intercultural knowledge. Jean-Marc Dewaele notes that "multicompetent multilinguals seem more aware and appreciative of the diversity in the world, [and are] able to consider it through the prism of their different languages and cultures.[14] Cem and Margaret Alptekin note that learners will develop an identity that is "able to transcend the parochial confines of the native and target cultures by understanding and appreciating cultural diversity and pluralism thanks to the new language, while not losing sight of native norms and values in the process."[15] Thus, the language learning process impacts how we conceptualize ourselves and cultural Others. Regardless of one's intercultural understandings at the outset, because language involves a new way of interpreting the world around us culturally, lexically, and abstractly, learners are likely to undergo some form of identity reorientation as they persist in their endeavors.[16]

Second, the act of utilizing one's learned skills and communicating with members of the target language community (i.e. engaging in intercultural communication) has also been show to impact how individuals perceive themselves in relation to cultural Others.[17] Chang In Shin and Ronald Jackson note that self-identity "emerges and

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[11] Bonny Norton, *Identity and Langauge Learning: Gender, Ethnicity, and Educational Change* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000); Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge eds., *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (Clevdon: Multilingual Matters, 2003).

[12] Andrea Simon-Maeda, *Being and Becoming a Speaker of Japanese: An Auto-Ethnographic Account* (Clevdon: Multilingual Matters, 2011), p. 117.

[13] Brown, *Principles of Language Learning*, p. 147.

[14] Marc-Jean Dewaele, "Second and Additional Language Acquisition," in Li Wei ed., *Applied Linguistics* (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), p.51.

[15] Cem Alptekin and Margaret Alptekin, "The Question of Culture: EFL Teaching in Non-English Speaking Countries," *ELT Journal* 38, no.1 (1984): 19.

[16] See also Jane Jackson, *Language, Identity, and Study Abroad: Sociocultural Perspectives* (London: Equinox, 2008).

[17] Geoff Alred, Michael Byram, and Mike Fleming, "Introduction," in Geof Alred, Michael Byram, and Mike Fleming eds., *Language for Intercultural Communication and Edcaation* (Clevdon: Multilingual Matters, 2003), pp. 1-13; Young Yun Kim, *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation* (London: Sage, 2000); Young Yun Kim, "Intercultural Personhood: Globalization and a Way of Being," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 32 (2008): 359-368; R.S. Zaharna, "Self-Shock: The Double-Binding Challenge of Identity," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 13 (1989): 501-525.

is constructed from relationships which are negotiated through communication."[18] Leiba Faier has stated that "encounters cannot but change the ways people see the world and how they move through it. They interrupt, if even ever so slightly, the paths that brought us to them and set us in new directions."[19] Young Y. Kim further notes that "cross-cultural adaptation is viewed as occurring as long as the individual remains in interaction with the host environment" and that "this interactive, communication-based conception...conceptualizes cross-cultural adaptation not as an independent or dependent variable, but as the totality of an individual's personal and social experiences vis-à-vis the host environment in and through a complex system of communicative interfaces."[20] In this, Kim argues that communicating across cultural boundaries, with cultural Others and in an environment that possesses various stressors for the participants, can compel transformations within these participants in ways that allow them to emerge with a greater understanding of and orientation towards cultural Otherness. One need not be restricted to defining themselves solely in terms of their own personal cultural group and instead can reconstruct an identity and sense of being that maintains a greater orientation towards diverse actors from different cultural backgrounds.

Kim presents a dynamic model of how individual interactants in intercultural communication arrive at their identity revelations. She discusses this in detail[21] and has outlined numerous variables that potentially influence this process.[22] In brief, she argues that individuals acquire intercultural skills through a "stress-adaptation-growth" dynamic whereby they develop adaptive strategies that allow them to better function in their sociocultural context as they grapple with the stressors presented by their particular environments. The end products of these stresses and adaptations can ultimately manifest as a "growth" in personal understandings of home and host culture in ways that permit more dynamic and inclusive forms of sociality and sentiments of personal identity to emerge. This is important because it provides a comprehensive and fundamental way to understand the transformations that individuals experience as they participate in intercultural encounters in different social contexts with diverse actors.

Third, critically reflecting upon one's intercultural interactive experiences can also provide an impetus for transformative changes to occur. This paper suggests that this reflection is an essential component of the identity transformation process. While both language learning and intercultural communication can lead to transformations in how one thinks of themselves and others, the process of critical reflection provides an intensified element through which identities can be renegotiated and reasserted. This is because interactions with members from other cultural groups can help individuals arrive at heightened understandings of who they are through comparisons.[23] It has been suggested that people experience more profound perceptual changes after they have undergone such reflections: "It is when they have some kind of experience which leads them to question these given conventions and values...that they become to become 'intercultural.'"[24] Everett Kleinjans described several "affective" variables that can facilitate greater intercultural understandings. These variables include "perception, appreciation, reevaluation, reorientation, identification, and outward actions." Speaking of "reevaluation" and "reorientation," he notes that reevaluation may comprise "a shift in priorities, the giving up of certain values for new ones, or an enlargement of one's own value system" and he describes reorientation as a "means changing the direction of one's life as a result of embracing new values internalized in the revaluation process." For identification, it involves "becoming one with the people of the

[18] Chang In Shin and Ronald L. Jackson, "A Review of Identity Research in Communication Theory: Reconceptualizing Cultural Identity," in William J. Starosta and Guo-Mind Chen eds., *Ferment in the Intercultural Field: Axiology/Value/Praxis* (London: Sage, 2012), pp. 212-231.

[19] Lieba Faier, *Intimate Encounters,* p. 25.

[20] Young Yun Kim, *Becoming Intercultural,* p. 23.

[21] See Young Yun Kim *Becoming Intercultural*; Young Yun Kim, "Intercultural Personhood,"; Young Yun Kim, "Finding a 'Home' Beyond Culture: The Emergence of Intercultural Personhood in the Globalizing World," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 46 (2015): 3-12.

[22] Young Yun Kim, "Beyond Cultural Categories: Communication, Adaptation, and Transformation," in Jane Jackson ed., *Routledge Handbook of Intercultural Communication* (London: Routledge), pp. 229-243.

[23] Michael Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* (Clevdon: Multilingual Matters, 1997); Michael Byram, "On Being 'Bicultural' and 'Intercultural.'"

[24] Geoff Alred, Michael Byram, and Mike Fleming, "Introduction," p. 3.

other culture," understood broadly. Here, Kleinjans is suggesting that through interacting with members of other cultures, and critically thinking about these interactions and their relationship to one's own culture, individuals can arrive at heightened understandings of themselves, their native culture, and the culture with which they are engaging.[25] Thus, becoming an intercultural person may inherently involve some greater degree of reflection and criticalness towards existing forms of identity that enhances and expands one's extant worldview.[26]

The extent to which reflection is or is not necessary for transformations to occur is not the primary focus of this paper; rather the purpose here is to underscore that reflection is an important mechanism through which individuals can and do arrive at transformations regarding their relationship to other people and especially to cultural Others. It is essential to recognize that, like language learning and intercultural communication, critical reflection can also induce identity transformations. This is important for comprehending the wider sociocultural context in which the actors below experienced their respective personal changes.

Intercultural understanding is marked by a heightened sense of awareness and sensitivity towards other cultures. Language learning and intercultural communication provide platforms upon which perceptual changes that induce greater intercultural sensitivity can occur.[27] Reflection upon one's intercultural encounters can further compel individuals to reconstruct the meanings of their encounters in ways that engender new ideas about interpersonal and intercultural relationships. The proceeding section will provide ethnographic vignettes into the lives of Japanese and foreigners in Japan that elucidate how exactly these theoretical points play out in everyday practice.

2. Intercultural Encounters in Japan

An important overarching factor that influences the nature of intercultural encounters in Japan is the way Japanese identity has formerly been constructed and asserted. During Japan's postwar period, a particular identity emerged that was founded upon notions of ethno-racial homogeneity and cultural uniqueness that perceptually differentiated Japanese from other Asian and western populations.[28] The proliferation and pervasiveness of this identity and its accompanying discourses have since led to the marginalization and exclusion of foreigners and social minorities within Japanese society.[29] For example, prejudices that suggest it is impossible for foreigners to learn Japanese and participate in Japanese culture (re)produce sentiments that rigidly divide foreigners and Japanese, and relegates Japan's foreign residents, regardless of their actual capabilities, to spheres of alterity. Foreigners and domestic minority populations have thus been precluded access to mainstream Japanese identity and have in many ways been placed in Japan's social peripheries.

One reason that such ideas have remained so widespread for so long is because Japan has, for the most part, actually remained relatively homogenous. Although scholars have taken issue with the assertion that Japan is "homogenous," and have made efforts to bring attention to Japan's current and historic diversity,[30] the fact remains that Japan is still a very homogenous nation, especially so in comparison with other industrialized societies.

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[25] Everett Kleinjans, "A Question of Ethnics," *International Educational and Cultural Exchange* 10, no. 4 (1975): 23-24.

[26] Marc-Jean Dewaele and Jan Pieter van Oudenhoven, "The Effect of Multilingualism/Multiculturalism on Personality: No Gain Without Pain for Third Culture Kids?" *International Journal of Multilingualism* 6 (2009): 1-17.

[27] David R. Byrd and Catherine A. Byrd, "The Role of Dissonance and Harmony in one L2 Learner's Identity Development during a Language Camp Experience Abroad," *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning* 2 (2013): 40-57.

[28] Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Melbourne: TransPacific Press, 2001); Eiji Oguma, *Tanitsu Minzoku Shinwa no Kigen* [The Myth of Homogenous Japan] (Tokyo: Shinyosha Press, 1995); Kosaku Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (London: Routlege 1992).

[29] Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity*; John Lie, *Multiethnic Japan*; Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth," *MELUS* 18, no. 4 (1993): 63-80; David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, "Transcultural Japan: Metamorphosis in the Cultural Borderlands and Beyond."

[30] Mark Hudson, *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999); Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth"; Eiji Oguma, *Tanitsu Minzoku Shinwa no Kigen*.

"Minority" populations are believed to comprise around 5% of Japan's population overall and when considering the number of minorities and foreigners who are indistinguishable from the mainstream population, the societal composition of conspicuously non-Japanese persons becomes even lower.[31] This ultimately means that Japanese encounters with cultural Otherness have heretofore been comparatively limited in scope. By and large, they have mostly been confined to particular sectors of Japan's society and labor market, outside of which they have not occurred to considerable extents. Thus, although Japan is undoubtedly more diverse than former constructions of identity and conventional discourses lead one to believe, the fact remains that up until very recently intercultural relations were still very constrained.

However, considering the aforementioned demographic changes Japan is presently experiencing, the overall nature of intercultural encounters within Japan can be expected to change accordingly. As greater numbers of foreigners from increasingly diverse backgrounds enter Japan, the contexts of intercultural relations between Japanese and foreigners can likewise be expected to become more diverse and dynamic. Although such profound demographic changes have not yet materialized in full, the past several decades have nonetheless brought foreigners and Japanese into contact with one another in ways never before experienced. Therefore, we can observe some of the already established Japanese-foreign relationships to obtain insights into how the future trajectory of Japanese-foreign relations may proceed.

This section will present ethnographic data that demonstrates how, *upon critical reflection after engaging in regularized intercultural interactions with foreigners, Japanese actors reconstructed their understandings of Japan, the role and positionality of foreigners within Japan, and their own senses of personal identity*. The data presented below marks a discernable shift in the ways Japanese-minority relations have heretofore been conceptualized. The following ethnographic vignettes depict how this has occurred and what Japanese informants have said happened to them as a result of their intercultural interactions. This section will demonstrate how different settings and types of intercultural encounters compel Japanese actors to reconstruct their understandings of Self and Otherness in particular ways but all of which generally lead to the same end result of a more intricate and dynamic understanding of Japan's diversity.

Data for this manuscript was gathered between 2013-2015 through interviews and participant-observation. Interviews were conducted formally and informally, were largely unstructured, and involved a variety of open-ended questions, which included: "What have your experiences interacting with Japanese/foreigners entailed?" "How do you feel that engaging in intercultural interaction has changed the way that you relate yourself to foreigners/Japanese?" "In what ways has living in Japan and experiencing Japan's demographic changes altered the ways you perceive yourself and wider Japanese society?" In total, over 100 interviews were conducted with Japanese and foreign informants. Interviewees were procured using snowball sampling and nonrandomized convenience sampling, and were conducted in English and/or Japanese.

Interviews were supplemented by participant-observation that occurred at various locations throughout Japan in which Japanese and foreigners came into regular contact with one another. These included foreign-owned and -operated establishments, religious institutions, and civic organizations, as well as various sorts of workplaces.

[31] Scholars often make categorical distinctions between minority populations in Japan. These groups are often divided into three overarching categories: Japan's "domestic" minorities, Japan's long-term resident minorities, and "newcomer" minorities. "Domestic" minorities include groups indigenous to Japan – such as Ainu, Burakumin, and Okinawans – who are today in many ways indistinguishable from the mainstream population but retain a distinct identity based on cultural and historic conditions of exclusion. Long-term resident minorities include former colonial subjects from other parts of Asia, mostly Korea and China, that migrated or were forcibly brought to Japan during Japan's colonial empire. The phrase "newcomer minorities" is typically used to describe those who migrated to Japan during the 1980s or later. It is important to note that these categories maintain markedly different experiences and attitudes towards Japanese society. For example, a Korean who arrived in Japan to study during the 2000s and has since stayed will have a very different experience than an ethnic Korean who was born, raised, and educated in Japan and whose family has resided in Japan since the early twentieth century. Japan's "domestic" minorities and long-term resident minorities have become in many ways indistinguishable from the mainstream population due to cultural assimilation.

Interview and observation data were qualitatively coded to ascertain broader, more generalizable themes that could speak to larger patterns within informants' responses.

The vignettes below have been selected because they most lucidly depict the ways individuals experienced changes as a result of their intercultural encounters. Much of the sentiment expressed here has been echoed by other informants as well. Thus, the data here is in many ways representative of wider societal attitudes that are developing throughout Japan today. However, it is also important to acknowledge the highly subjective aspects of these experiences and note that the subsequent discussion is meant to provide details about broader developing patterns that are emerging from intercultural encounters; they should not be seen as hard truths that one should expect all participants engaging in intercultural communication to experience. There will be diverse ways that people experience such encounters and thus there are some limitations on this paper's generalizability. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that palpable patterns could be ascertained that bespeak the current situation that exists on the ground in Japan today.

(1) Koji

Koji[32] is a bar worker in his mid-thirties who works in a popular nightlife neighborhood in Tokyo. For the past several years, he was employed by Nigerian bar owners in two separate establishments. While working these jobs, Koji regularly interacted with Nigerian bosses, co-workers, and customers. He also engaged regularly with foreigners and businesses associates from other non-Japanese backgrounds. Through these encounters, Koji was unexpectedly made aware of the diverse nature of Japan's foreign community and emerged from his work experience with a more refined comprehension of the true scope of Japan's diversity, as well as a broader conceptualization of foreigners and their experiences in Japan.

In his own words, Koji explained: "Never in my life did I imagine I would be working for a Nigerian boss! Before I started working in Shinjuku, I was not aware there were so many foreigners in Japan, especially Africans."[33] He also noted that he has gradually become more aware of the differences between African nationalities and ethnic groups. Before working in these bars, Koji professed that he didn't know anything about Africa's diversity, but his work made him aware of it and he departed from his work experiences with a more intricate understanding of the scope of Africa's diversity. He explained: "After working in bars owned by Africans for six years, I now appreciate the difference between Nigerians and Ghanaians, between Igbo people and Yoruba people, and between African Christians and Muslims."[34] Koji believed that this knowledge put him a unique position because he said that most other Japanese would not likely be able to recognize these important ethno-national differences between Africans, either in Japan or abroad.

Koji explained that his direct encounters with Africans raised his awareness of the experiences of foreigners in Japan in a number of ways. For one, he came to better understand the Africans that he regularly engaged with and began to more accurately comprehend their experiences living and working in Japan. Before these experiences, Koji said that he was largely unaware that there were so many foreigners in Japan and was especially surprised to learn of the existence of so many Africans in Japan. By establishing interpersonal relationships with his bosses, co-workers, and clients, Koji observed that many of them were honest people trying to make a living. This repudiated some of the negative things he had formerly heard about foreigners, especially with regards to Nigerians and other Africans. He notes: "I had heard negative things about Nigerians. Some people said they were involved with crime and scams. But, after I worked for them and served them in my bar for some time, I realize that many of them are

[32] All names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms.
[33] Paul Capobianco, "Confronting Diversity: Africans Challenging Japanese Societal Convictions," *Contemporary Japan* 27, no. 2 (2015): 195.
[34] Paul Capobianco, "Confronting Diversity: Africans Challenging Japanese Societal Convictions," *Contemporary Japan* 27, no. 2 (2015): 195.

honest people and are not criminals. There are some bad ones, but most are just looking to make a living like me." Thus, by regularly engaging with Africans and other foreigners in this particular work environment, Koji expanded how he understood the diversity that existed within Japan and conceptually repositioned foreigners with a greater orientation towards ethnic Japanese.

Koji explains that this awareness subsequently led him to reflect on what this meant for Japan's future: "I didn't realize this earlier but I now see that Japan is changing. It is changing in a complicated way. Many people like to describe Japan in one way and don't like to see it from different perspectives, but we have to do that. It is not enough to just say that Japan is home to Japanese and that there are criminal foreigners in Japan. We need to really think about Japan and who lives here. That is the only way that we can have a better future for everyone."

Through his encounters with foreigners via his workplace, Koji became more aware of the experiences of Africans and other foreign populations that reside and operate within Japan's borders. Correspondingly, this provided a somewhat surprising depiction of the present nature of contemporary Japan itself. Koji's reflection on the broader implications of his intercultural work and communicative experiences permitted him to arrive at a more constructive comprehension of foreign Otherness and Japan's newfound diversity. Although Koji states that he was not particularly xenophobic before working in said bars, he also noted that he really did not have any feelings, positive or negative, about the existence of foreigners in Japan. It was only after his actual encounters with foreigners and his subsequent critical reflection did he ultimately come to better understand their experiences and impact on Japanese society.

(2) The Nakamura Family

Another interesting channel through which foreigners and Japanese are establishing relationships is through homestay programs organized by universities, schools, and private companies. While there is nothing fundamentally novel about this practice, what is noteworthy are the increasingly diverse backgrounds of students that study in Japan and who correspondingly participate in such homestays. Data I have obtained from Japanese host families demonstrates how interacting with their host children have effectively transformed their sense of identity at the personal and collective levels, as well as the ways that they conceptualize the scope of diversity that exists within Japanese society.

A vignette from the Nakamura family explains how these changes unfold in everyday practice. This family consists of two Japanese host parents and their two host children from Nigeria. The local university that the two Nigerian "children" attended was responsible for arranging the homestay. The Nakamura parents initially offered to host one student but later, upon meeting and establishing a strong connection with one of their original children's friends, agreed to host a second. The parents developed a close relationship with their children; their own children having grown and started their own families elsewhere, they enjoyed the company of their host children and enjoyed learning about their home country and continent. Their children likewise enjoyed the relationship that developed and were appreciative of the assistance their parents offered them and their families while in Japan.

As the relationship with their host children evolved, the Nakamura parents were made aware of the difficulties their children faced living and studying in Japan. Since they believed that both of their children were sociable and linguistically competent, they were surprised to learn of the difficulties they both experienced. The Nakamura host father stated: "It was troubling to hear of the problems [our children] faced. Our own children never had such problems and if they were not our [host] children, we would have never known about such issues." The Nakamura mother added: "It is very disheartening. Knowing that people you care for struggle because of your own culture's practices makes you feel sad and makes you want to help however you can." The Nakamuras vowed to offer help to their children, their families, and any friends that they might have and, according to their host children, have genuinely done so whenever the chance presented itself.

Such a change in attitudes occurred despite the fact that these parents were already somewhat oriented towards and accepting of foreign cultures. If they had possessed xenophobic or prejudice attitudes, it is highly unlikely they would have volunteered to act as host parents in the first place. However, having been made aware of the difficulties faced by their children, who they came to sincerely care for, the Nakamura parents were compelled to reflect critically on extant Japanese cultural practices and social norms that have not always been accommodating to foreigners. The Nakamura mother explained: "My [first son] complained that Japanese people were too insincere to him and didn't understand his perspective. At first I didn't believe him but when [our second host son] said very similar things, we began to take them more seriously. We talked with both of them about these issues and it was shocking to hear that they were treated so badly." The father also noted: "I don't think we would have believed them if we weren't so close to them. But because we think of them our own children, we [had] to take them seriously."

Being made aware of the difficulties their host children experienced compelled the Nakamuras to critically reflect upon who they are and what type of society they actually live in. They took their children's claims with great concern and reflected on the practices that brought their children such stress. This challenged their own perceptions of Japan and led them to reconsider their own cultural identity. The mother stated: "Hearing [our son's] struggles living in Japan really opened my eyes and made me sympathize with his difficulties. We promised to always offer him help when he needed it and he really became like a son to us." The parents recognized that although Japan was not a place particularly accommodating to outsiders, they nonetheless believed that their children would be able to abate any difficulties living in Japan because they were so linguistically functional and culturally accepting. However, when this proved not to be the case, the Nakamuras reconsidered their understandings of Japanese society and through critical reflection about the difficulties their children and other foreign residents encountered, reconstructed how they envisaged Japanese society, as well as the foreigners who exist within it. The Nakamura mother explained: "For us, it was difficult to learn that your society is causing so much pain for people that you care about. We cannot change this, but we can change ourselves and offer our help to those who need it. Meeting my [host] children was a very important experience that made me think more seriously about who I was as a person."

Although it can be said that the Nakamuras possessed an orientation towards foreign Otherness at the outset, they nevertheless arrived at revelations about themselves, Japan, and the experiences of foreigners through their relations with their host children. From their intercultural interactions, they were compelled to reflect upon their own identities and the experiences of cultural Others living and operating in their native culture. These intercultural encounters and the critical reflections that accompanied them thus induced further identity changes regarding the ways that Japanese actors conceptualized themselves in relation to foreigners (i.e. changes to their orientation towards cultural Otherness within Japan). The Nakamuras ultimately emerged from these encounters with a greater sensitivity to and understanding of what the experiences of foreigners in Japan entailed. With regards to the problems foreigners faced in Japan, the Nakamura parents realized that Japan was not how they had formerly envisioned it, which led them to reconsider their former constructions of Japan, as well as what Japan is presently comprised of.

(3) Suichiro

Intercultural encounters between Japanese and people of non-Japanese backgrounds are not only occurring in Japan but also abroad. As Japanese tourists, students, and professionals continue to move across national borders for various reasons, the number of channels through which Japanese and foreigners come into contact with one another further expand and diversify. One such example of how travel experiences and subsequent intercultural interactions *within* Japan can lead to changes in the way people conceptualize themselves and their identities can be seen in the case of Suichiro, a young Japanese man who spent time abroad. While he reported that his experience abroad was transformative in itself, he also professed that he continued to experience self-identity changes after

returning to Japan. Upon closer analysis, these changes emerged due to a critical and comparative reflection of his experiences abroad and his experiences engaging in intercultural encounters within Japan. Specifically, Suichiro came to realize that Japan is a more intercultural space than he had formerly acknowledged and that some of his experiences abroad were shared by foreigners living in Japan. This subsequently compelled him to reconfigure his own perceptions of himself and his home country with greater consideration for the experiences of foreigners.

Suichiro is a Japanese graduate student who recently completed a post-graduate study program in the United States. He spent about eighteen months abroad and I met him six months after he returned to Japan. Studying in the United States was Suichiro's first experience living in a foreign country and he confessed that he didn't know what to expect before embarking on his trip. He was forced to put his English language and intercultural communication skills to the test during his study program and at first he experienced many of difficulties. His lack of prior communication experience in English especially proved to be a burden that emotionally distressed him. He even thought at one point to abandon his studies and return to Japan. However, despite such struggles, he persevered and made efforts to work past the language, communication, and cultural barriers he faced.

As Suichiro's study abroad continued, he began to see his growing possession of intercultural capital as something positive and something that set him apart from other people. He started to understand himself as a more multicultural individual and realized that this experience might prove especially vital for him when he returns to Japan. He elaborated: "In America, I gained some skills and confidence that I think can help me to grow as a person. I realized that I can understand problems from both Japanese and American perspectives. By the time I left, I felt that I had become much comfortable in America and felt like I was leaving a place that way my home. It was very sad." At the conclusion of his study program, Suichiro had constructed an image of himself vis-à-vis Japanese who lacked such international and intercultural experience, which ultimately led him to think of himself as a more interculturally oriented person: "Going to study in the U.S. is something that not many other Japanese can do. I think they really lack the ability to understand foreign culture, but I now I can. I think this is something that is important that [distinguishes me] as a more unique Japanese [person]." Thus, his study abroad experience affected how he thought of himself in relation to both Japanese and non-Japanese persons.

After he returned to Japan, Suichiro made efforts to preserve his language skills by befriending foreigners living in Japan. After successfully doing so, he realized that much of what foreigners told him was similar to his own experiences abroad. He explained: "Foreigners I meet in Japan have had a lot of similar experiences. They struggle with language, culture, and communication problems and say that they have a hard time finding people to help them. One foreigner told me that he was sick but couldn't visit the doctor because he wasn't confident in his [Japanese] communication skills. This was the exact same experience that I had my first month in America! I remember very clearly how I was sick and looking on the internet for [remedies] I could make at home to cure my sickness because I didn't want to visit the doctor and have to communicate." Suichiro also cited numerous other similarities between himself and foreigners he met in Japan and explained that he was surprised such problems occurred in his home country: "It seems stupid but I really didn't think foreigners experienced these things in Japan. I know foreigners live and work here, but since I really only had limited experiences with them, I never knew what they were experiencing. Only after I heard what difficulties they faced *after experiencing such things myself* was I able to relate to their experiences."

Through establishing relations with foreigners in Japan and critically comparing his own experiences abroad to theirs, Suichiro reformulated his sense of self-identity and his perceived role of foreigners in Japan. Specifically, foreigners became more relatable to him and the parallels he drew between his experiences in America and theirs in Japan allowed him to perceive them as conceptually closer via their shared experiences. He explained: "The shared experiences that we had seems like more than just a coincidence. I think these are difficulties that all people moving abroad have to face at some point and because of that I think we need to help each other and really think

about what we can do to improve the experiences of others in our home country. I was lucky that America had many foreign people there. Many were willing to help me and most Americans were usually patient with me. According to my foreign friends, that is not always true in Japan. Since Japan is mostly all Japanese, there must be some instances where they have had very hard times just like me." Here, Suichiro implies that efforts need to be made to improve the quality of intercultural communicative experiences within Japan and that he now possesses better capabilities that may allow him personally to do so. Such revelations were only possible after critical and comparative reflection induced by both Suichiro's experiences abroad, as well as his experiences interacting with foreigners from different countries within the context of Japanese society.

By shifting the locus of his intercultural encounters from abroad to home, Shuichiro reconceptualized his own identity and his experiences as they related to those of foreigners residing in Japan. He also acknowledged that his experiences abroad greatly shaped the way he thought of himself in relation to other Japanese, which substantiates the literature above that discusses the transformative capacity of intercultural encounters and positive experiences growing out of environmental stress. Once the location of intercultural encounters changed from outside Japan to within Japan, Suichiro further experienced identity and perceptual changes due to the content of his intercultural encounters. Upon discovering that he shared many of the same experiences abroad as foreigners had in Japan, he was compelled to reconsider the ways foreigners were perceived and positioned within Japanese society and in relation to himself.

(4) Foreigners

While Japanese informants have been crucial for underscoring the conceptual changes that can emerge from intercultural encounters, foreigners are also acknowledging the multifaceted ways that their presence and participation in Japanese society work to reconfigure interpersonal relationships and intercultural understandings. As Japan's diversification continues, such channels of Japanese-foreigner interaction will only further diversify accordingly. It therefore appears inevitable that the geographic distribution of foreigners, their professions and workplaces, and the forms of sociality they engage in will likewise become further variegated. It is then noteworthy to mention a few foreign voices who see themselves as participating in this changing of interpersonal relations between foreigners and Japanese.

First, it is important to recall the work of Leiba Faier, who has identified the changing nature of interpersonal relationships between rural Japanese residents and Filipina wives who move into rural localities. Due to an outward migration of young women into urban areas, many Japanese rural localities are left with an inadequate number of younger females and, as a result, rural areas have experienced an influx of migration from foreign women.[36] In her detailed ethnography, Faier demonstrates how, through localized intercultural encounters between Japanese and Filipina wives, these actors "create new meanings of Japanese and Filipino culture and identity through their shared daily lives."[37] She focuses explicitly on the forms of sociality that emerge from the intercultural encounters between these parties and shows that they provide a fertile ground upon which new meanings are formulated. One outcome of this process is that Filipinas negotiate their identities and social positionality as embedded in a larger web of identity politics but also in a position that is locally grounded to the particular geographical and cultural context.[38] Although Faier argues that these identities remain shaped by unequal power dynamics, the ultimate product is a more culturally amalgamated sense of belonging exhibited by both Filipina and Japanese actors. Her ethnography makes an important contribution to understanding the ways local intercultural interactions are leading to the

[36] Lieba Faier, *Intimate Encounters,* p. 15.
[37] Lieba Faier, *Intimate Encounters,* p. 1.
[38] Lieba Faier, *Intimate Encounters,* Chapter 1.

emergence of novel forms of identity and interpersonal understanding within Japan, which also alter the conceptual and material positionality of foreigners within Japanese society.

Second, there is the voice of a foreign teacher in Japan, Kennedy, who is worthy of mention. Kennedy is from east Africa and has been teaching in Japan for several years while his wife, also east African, attends a local university. Kennedy is not the only non-western teacher in Japan nor the only African teacher. However, Kennedy is the one who I have become closest with and who has provided the most revealing data. His accounts provide a window into understanding the ways that foreign teachers' interactions with their students are changing interpersonal dynamics in multifaceted ways.

Kennedy explains:

> "Coming into my classes, new students don't know much about me. Sometimes they are curious or maybe confused. I tell them 'Don't be shy! We will have fun in here!' Then they start to laugh and be happy or warm up to my teaching. It is in my classes that students can experience and learn about Africa. But they are also teaching me things. I learn so much about Japan and Japanese culture from my students, especially the older ones. I don't think I can ever fully be a part of Japan because I am not Japanese, but teaching my students helps me to understand Japan and myself a lot better. I like to see the commonalities I share with my students and then compare how we are different. I think this is the best way for us to grow as people."

In effect, Kennedy believes that his experiences teaching his students and learning the norms of Japanese culture have affected him in many ways. Other foreign teachers of non-western backgrounds have noted similar things of their teaching experiences as well. The diversification of foreign teachers in Japan is a little known but important component of the mechanisms that lead to changes in the ways that interpersonal relations are conceptualized. By exposing Japanese students to teachers from a wider range of backgrounds, there is a greater likelihood that students will depart from their study experiences with a greater understanding of their teachers' native culture. For example, one Nigerian teacher explained that in his English classes, he would often incorporate pictures and information about his home country that were unexamined in his students' textbooks, which he believes modified and enhanced his pupils' understanding of Nigeria. Such occurrences are becoming increasingly common as more and more foreign teachers from diverse backgrounds engage their Japanese students.

One final foreign voice worthy of mention is that of an east African student named Jonathan who is completing his doctorate in Japan. He has studied Japanese for many years and has passed the highest level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. When speaking with him about his experiences, he explained:

> "Living in Japan has made the country a part of me. I have language skills and I am able to communicate without problems unlike other people. One thing that I believe I do differently from other foreigners is that I try to adapt to Japanese culture *all the time*, not just when it is convenient for me. Many foreigners take this kind of *chūto hanpa* [half-measures] way of adapting to Japan and they usually get frustrated with it. Well, it is because you are not fully committed and you don't realize the ways that you have to adapt yourself! You have to be ready for the adaptation and the following change."

Jonathan additionally noted: "Of course I have changed. There is no way that I can look at my home country the same way. I love [where I am from] but living in Japan I see the world differently. I sometimes feel out of place

back home even though it is where I am from." Still further, he too mentioned indirectly the role that reflection played in his development of an intercultural identity: "Dealing with people from other cultures is challenging. I think most of us would avoid it if we can. But sometimes we can't and we can't expect the places we move to will change for us. We need to make the effort too. We can't sit back and let them do all the effort. It *is when we really think about ourselves and our relationship to the place we live can we realize what we need to do to survive*." This is especially interesting in that it embodies many of the changes that Japanese experienced through their encounters with foreigners except from the opposite perspective. Jonathan is not alone in his feelings; many other foreigners have professed to me similar sentiments. The pervasiveness of such sentiments implies that there exists a dialectic process by which intercultural encounters engender identity transformations and lead individual actors to reconstruct their relationship to others.

The disparate examples above demonstrate that as Japanese and foreigners engage with one another on a regularized basis, individuals may be compelled to reconstruct notions of themselves, cultural Others, and the society of which they are all apart. As more Japanese participate in interactions with foreigners from increasingly diverse backgrounds, these situations can be expected to likewise further diversify and intensify in the near future. These experiences and intercultural encounters have often developed in highly specified contexts that are idiosyncratic to the particular actors involved. Despite this high degree of particularity, however, the end results have been similar in that many Japanese have developed from these encounters a more dynamic understanding of Japan's foreign populations and vice-versa.

(5) Communicative Failures

Before moving on to discuss the implications of these intercultural interactions and critical reflections, it is first useful to recognize that such encounters do not represent the entirety of relationships that have developed between foreigners and Japanese. Throughout data collection there were also several examples in which intercultural interactions *did not* lead to more positive perceptions of cultural Others and greater intercultural competence but instead worked to establish and reinforce negative sentiments towards the other party. Although such individuals comprised a minority of all the data collected, it would be negligent to entirely overlook such voices.

From the Japanese perspective, some complained that their engagements with foreigners have led to more hostile sentiments towards diversity. For instance, one Japanese airport worker said that her experiences with Chinese co-workers and travelers have led her to develop a discernably negative attitude towards Chinese and foreigners more broadly. She arrived at the conclusion that it was difficult for Chinese to integrate well because they have such different attitudes and behaviors. In similar fashion, a number of scholarly works on Latin American populations in Japan have shown that various levels of interactions with Latin Americans have led some Japanese to develop more negative attitudes of them for reasons that they attribute to irreconcilable cultural differences.[39] Although intercultural encounters carry transformative capacities, the fact that they are merely occurring is not enough for them to engender positive cross-cultural relations.

There have also been many foreigners who have likewise been disappointed by their experiences in Japan and have accordingly developed negative sentiments. One Ethiopian student who studied in Europe before coming to Japan suggested that the pragmatic difficulties of living in Japan were just too much for an outsider handle. He believed that Japanese are not willing to help foreigners to any considerable extent, which makes regular activities such as visiting doctors or banks a major burden for those short on linguistic and cultural fluency. Another western teacher explained that although she was fluent in Japanese, she never felt accepted and believed that she was treated

[39] See Joshua H. Roth, *Brokered Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Migrants in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Takeyuki G. Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

differently from her colleagues in both positive and negative ways. Because she was an outsider and new to the work culture, she stated that she was not treated as a full member of her school but rather, as she describes it, a "disposable person" who lacked the collegial embracement her co-workers enjoyed amongst themselves. Thus, foreigners too do not always develop positive attitudes from their intercultural encounters and it is important to recognize that intercultural interactions can, for many different reasons, unfortunately lead to more hostile attitudes rather than more accepting ones.

Other examples abound with similar relational failures. With the exception of a few sources,[40] most scholarly analyses have highlighted the problematic nature of intercultural encounters and there is no dearth in literature on these issues. Scholars have discussed in great detail the problematic relations that exist between Japanese and minorities in general,[41] as well as between Japanese and specific groups of minorities, such as long-term resident Koreans,[42] Latin Americans and Japanese-descent persons from Latin America,[43] African-Americans,[44] and others.[45] Such a wealth of literature establishes that sociocultural and communicative problems between foreigners and Japanese do exist. However, rather than once again revisit these problematic encounters, or depict an idealistic forecast for future relations, this paper describes how there are also emerging alternatives to Japanese-foreigner encounters that are quite different from those which have been heretofore discussed. The aforementioned positive intercultural and reflexive experiences are intended to provide an alternative to these negative interactions, which have taken up so much space in the existing literature. In short, one should not overlook or downplay these communicative failures but they should also observe that there are feasible alternatives to them that are in many cases unfolding on the ground.

3. Discussion

Through examining the evolving nature of Japanese-foreign relations, we can ascertain several important conclusions and implications moving forward. As Japan continues to diversify, the frequency of such encounters can only be expected to intensify and compel further changes to the way these groups are positioned in relation to each other and wider society. These findings also have pragmatic implications for understanding interpersonal relations and the positionality of foreigners in Japan, as well as theoretical implications concerning the transformative capacities of these particular transpirations.

First, and most relevant to this paper, is the important role that critical reflection plays in allowing these intercultural communicative patterns and identity revelations to manifest. It is not merely the platform of interpersonal communication that engenders changes in the positive but rather these changes also seem to require some degree of critical reflection or comparisons. In the above vignettes, critical thinking about one's dominant/native cultural tendencies compelled individual actors to reconstruct their understandings of Self and Other, as well as conceptually reconfigure how they are positioned in relation to the other group.

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[40] Lieba Faier, *Intimate Encounters*; Hui, "From Ethnic Ghetto to 'Gourmet Republic.'"

[41] David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, "Transcultural Japan: Metamorphosis in the Cultural Borderlands and Beyond."

[42] John Lie, *Multiethnic Japan;* Sonia Ryang, *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin* (London: Routledge, 2000).

[43] Roth, *Brokered Homeland*; Takeyuki G. Tsuda, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland.* Ayumi Takenaka, "Paradoxes of Ethnicity-Based Immigration: Peruvian and Japanese-Peruvian Migrants in Japan," in Roger Gooman ed., *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Immigrant and Overseas Communities* (London: Routeldge, 2005), pp. 222-237.

[44] John Russell, "Consuming Passions: Spectacle, Self-Transformation, and the Commodification of Blackness in Japan," *positions* 6, no. 1 (1998): 113-177; John Russell, "Race as Ricorso: Blackface(s), Racial Representation, and the Transnational Apologetics of Historical Amnesia in the United States and Japan," in Yasuki Takezawa ed., *Racial Representations in Asia* (Melbourne: TransPacific Press, 2011), pp. 124-147.

[45] See David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu eds., *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, and Identity* and Roger Goodman ed., *Global Japan: The Experience of Japan's New Immigrant and Overseas Communities* for more comprehensive examples.

In the above examples, critical reflection occurred in diverse ways but often produced similar results: a broader understanding of Self and Other that in subjective ways transcended the personal milieu of contemporary Japan. These reflections were idiosyncratically and uniquely experienced by each of the informants respectively. The material outcomes of these experiences proceeded similarly. Via their interactive experiences, Koji and the Nakamuras were exposed to facts that compelled them to reconsider their preconceived views and in turn empathized with the feelings and difficulties foreigners were forced to confront in Japan. Suichiro also arrived at his transformations via contrasting his personal experiences with those of foreigners in Japan. In each of these cases, informants came to perceive foreigners differently – more positively – as a result of these events. In other words, by establishing relations with foreigners and considering what their experiences in Japan entailed compelled these informants to make conceptual alterations that affected their views of the experiences of Japan's foreigners.

It can also be suggested that this critical reflection occurred in the examples that engendered negative outcomes as well. The failures at communicating interculturally and the lack of perceptual changes seem to have also involved varying degrees of reflection, which ultimately resulted in the differing ways informants holding such ideas established and maintained them. For example, the Ethiopian student critically compared Japan to his experiences in Europe and arrived at the conclusion that there must be greener pastures elsewhere. While he did not mention specifically what this comparison entailed, it is obvious that comparing the difficulties experienced in both locations led him to arrive at these conclusions. Therefore, one must realize that not all critical reflections will arrive at more positive understandings of Self and Other, and on the contrary may in fact work to reinforce negative images of cultural Others

These outcomes beg the question of what exactly the process of this critical reflection entails. How did informants critically reflect to arrive at their particular positions? When did these reflections occur? Because these reflections were recognized *post-hoc*, the author was unable to inquire into the mechanisms of informants' reflections specifically. However, reflection can be defined as a highly personalized process that can occur consciously or subconsciously at any stage during intercultural interaction. It was also uniquely experienced in each of the cases above. For example, Koji's reflection came through the realization that Nigerians and other Africans were not in fact troublemakers or people dangerous to Japanese society. His everyday experiences challenged and ultimately repudiated any negative stories he may have heard prior to actually engaging in intercultural interaction. Although Koji did not specify that he consciously contemplated mentally the ramifications of his work experiences with Africans, it is hard to deny that his firsthand interactions destabilized any ideas he may have had before he started working for Nigerian bosses.

For the Nakamuras, reflection came through the relationship they established with their host children. By hearing the difficulties their children faced in Japan, the parents were compelled to reconsider their ideas and reformulate how they perceived foreign experiences in Japan with a greater sensitivity to what foreigners actually experienced. The Nakamuras suggested they probably would not have believed what their children had told them if the information had come from a different source. They thus felt genuinely compelled to reconsider their preconceptions because these issues were raised by people that they cared about. Suichiro, after realizing that he shared many experiences with those of foreigners in Japan, similarly reconstructed his notions of Self and Other in a way that likewise bridged the gap between himself and cultural Others. These examples exemplify how critical reflections upon extant identity constructions and cultural practices can be understood as an important component of intercultural processes and induced through direct relationships with cultural Others.

On the other hand, for the Ethiopian student, a comparison of life in Europe to life in Japan led him to reflect critically upon his experiences. A similar process of engaging cultural Others had occurred but a critical comparison led him to perceive these experiences negatively. While the data presented here is limited, it can nonetheless be suggested that intercultural encounters engendered critical reflective processes, which occurred in diverse fashions.

Such evidence portrays the multifaceted ways that reflections may unfold in practice; they may be compelled by everyday encounters; they may occur through establishing intimate relations with people from different cultural backgrounds; they may occur through genuine comparisons between personal experiences; or they may in fact be compelled by some other, highly personalized, interactive processes. However they occur, the end results have ramifications for interpersonal relations that transcend the nature of the particular interactions themselves.

Such diversity in experiences suggest that no two reflective experiences may be alike and that there may be a multitude of ways through which individuals arrive at and maintain their critically reflected standpoints. It also demonstrates that these processes may occur consciously or subconsciously and engaging with cultural Others serves as their impetus. While individuals may not realize that they have undergone this reflection, the material outcomes are difficult to ignore. Recognizing the impact that critical reflection can have on interpersonal and intercultural relations is important for understanding how cross-cultural dynamics develop not only in contemporary Japan but also in diverse environments across the world.

Secondly, these vignettes demonstrate the transformative capacity of intercultural communication and corresponding reflection. As the context of interpersonal encounters takes on a discernably different dynamic when it involves actors from different cultural backgrounds, it is important to see that the participants involved in the aforementioned interactions epitomize the capacity for constructive changes to emerge out of them. As Kim has noted, "the process of crossing cultures challenges the very basis of who we are as cultural beings. It offers opportunities for new learning and growth. Being 'uprooted' from our home brings us understandings not only of the people and their culture in our new environment, but of ourselves and our home culture."[46] The changes that the Japanese and foreign participants indicated above show lucidly the ways that interpersonal intercultural interactions are capable of transforming the parties involved. Recognizing this helps contextualize the macro-level social processes that compel such changes to occur.

Relatedly, it is important to acknowledge the role that language learning and communicating in a second language plays in this process. Although not the primary focal point of this paper, if the Japanese and foreign actors mentioned above did not share some common capacity for communication, it is highly unlikely these perceptual changes would have unfolded in the particular ways they did. This suggests that future studies investigating the transformative capacity of intercultural communication should examine more meticulously the language acquisition process, as well as how it shapes the ways that different actors utilize language to position themselves in relation to one another.

Third, this data also underscores the materiality of intercultural interactions and critical reflections. These critical and comparative perspectives allowed individuals to reconstruct images of themselves, cultural Others, and the societies in which they live in more dynamic and comprehensive ways that are more capable of grasping the realities they contain. Emerging from these encounters were reformulated understandings of Self and Other, which play out in different ways among the disparate actors involved. Although qualitative data is naturally anecdotal in nature, the professed attitudinal changes expressed by the informants above emphasize how greater intercultural competence and bicultural characteristics can emerge through cross-cultural communicative encounters. Both Byram and Paulston have suggested that "bicultural" individuals are capable of critically reflecting on their communicative experiences in ways that lead to more dynamic and accepting cultural understandings. While it would perhaps be a stretch to identify the Japanese informants above as truly bicultural persons, their reflexivity and growth in personal and cultural dimensions demonstrate that the roots of bicultural personalities are to some extent coming into being.

Through establishing intercultural relationships, the informants above acquired at the least a heightened sensitivity towards cultural Others and at most a closer orientation and acceptance of them. For the Japanese actors,

[46] Kim, *Becoming Intercultural*, pp. 9.

interacting and establishing relationships with foreigners changed the way they perceived foreigners within Japan, as well as the nature of foreign Otherness more broadly. Koji, for instance, recognized that African Otherness was not one homogenous entity but instead was comprised of diverse ethnic, national, linguistic, and religious groups, who often did not fit into stereotypical images and media portrayals. The Nakamuras and Suichiro realized that foreigners in Japan experienced considerable difficulties, which they heretofore had not acknowledged despite their previous experiences with and orientations towards foreign Otherness. Similar sentiments can also be seen by foreigners. As Jonathan explained, he believes he has become more oriented towards Japan – if not, more culturally Japanese – from his experiences and has come to appreciate the positive aspects of life in Japan to a much greater extent. His reference to reverse culture shock when returning home resonates profoundly through many foreign voices in Japan and is thus not an anomaly. This suggests that through their experiences, Japanese and foreign actors deconstruct their former self-perceptions and can potentially recast themselves a new with more consideration of their intercultural experiences in Japan.

4. Conclusion

This paper highlights patterns and anomalies of intercultural communication between Japanese and foreigners in Japan. The informants discussed in this paper experienced growth and/or perceptual changes as a result of their intercultural experiences. They did so in ways that allowed for more dynamic and versatile understandings of personhood and interpersonal relations to emerge. However, these individuals arrived at their intercultural growth through their varied and unique experiences. Although discernable patterns were ascertained, the discussion shows that to truly grasp how identities and perceptions develop through intercultural communication and critical reflection require careful attention to the particularities of the actors involved. Nonetheless, particular exceptions notwithstanding, more positive intercultural encounters, such as the ones described in the previous section, can play a crucial role in reshaping Japanese-foreign relations.

Engaging in direct and "prolonged" contact with people from different cultural backgrounds compelled Japanese and foreign residents to effectively reformulate how they conceptualized themselves and the other party, as well as towards the society in which they live. For many, both parties emerged from their experiences with a more positive understanding of cultural Otherness and recast their own senses of Self in more inclusive ways with a greater openness towards the other. This was achieved through the use of a common medium (language) of communication and critical reflection that was induced by intercultural encounters. Without having partaken in such encounters, these actors would likely not have been capable of reforming their understandings of the other party in the particular ways that they did. As Japan continues to change demographically, and the paths through which Japanese and foreigners cross become more diverse and pervasive, it will serve well to examine how intercultural encounters, critical reflections, and reconstructed identities factor into the ongoing sociocultural realities of twenty-first century Japan.